Freedom Watch™

Citizens Project

CFV's New Spin: It's a "Consolidation"

At its January meeting, the District 11 School Board approved a revised student publications policy to protect students' freedom of speech. This came after the controversy about earlier school newspaper articles on gay teens.

After approving this policy, many expected the Board to move on to pressing issues such as overseeing the bond developments and implementing high academic standards.

Under pressure from Colorado for Family Values, however, the Board instead will examine whether District 11 needs a new, more restrictive, sexual conduct policy.

Looking ahead

Commenting on CFV's proposal, many Board members expressed their support for the current, state-mandated abstinence-based policy. They objected to CFV's claim that District 11 promotes promiscuity or condemns traditional marriage.

Will Perkins is attempting to craft a different face for CFV's proposal.

Board members also noted that school policy needs to be sensitive to the students that the District serves, the majority of which live in "untraditional" families.

The Board ultimately asked the school administration to compile all curriculum references to abstinence and related policies for review, probably at a March Board meeting.

Deja Vu: It's the Amendment 2 strategy again.

CFV's new spin

When CFV unveiled its proposed sexual conduct policy in January, the organization distributed 130,000 pre-printed postcards around town to generate a show of support for its new proposal. Focus on the Family President Dr. James Dobson had CFV Chairman Will Perkins on his radio program and endorsed CFV's new campaign. After Perkins explained the changes that CFV's proposed policy would bring, Dobson encouraged his listeners to support CFV's effort to get the policy adopted in District 11.

Recently, however, Perkins has attempted to craft a different face for the CFV proposal.

Writing in the *Gazette Telegraph*, Perkins downplayed the new elements in CFV's proposal. Instead he suggested that CFV merely wants to have District 11 "consolidate" its existing policies.

Existing D-11 policies already support an abstinence-based approach to sexuality, as CFV (and everyone else) wants. But CFV also wants the District to go further and affirm traditional marriage "in all aspects of school life." As outlined in the February *Freedom Watch*, this policy change will provide CFV and its supporters with many new opportunities to promote an anti-gay agenda in our schools.

Deja vu

It's the Amendment 2 strategy again. A proposal as simple and innocuous as possible... Perkins' reassurance that there's no real change... CFV's soft sell to the general public.

But underneath it's a different story. CFV's reason for existence, as stated in its published mission statement, is to "oppose the militant gay agenda." CFV is investing substantial time, money and energy in its campaign to get this sexual conduct policy implemented in District 11. Would CFV do so if this policy does not, in some way, further its stated mission?

Of course not.

The never-ending campaign

D-11 schools are the first step in CFV's new campaign. If CFV is successful in District 11, we can expect them to push other school districts locally and throughout Colorado to adopt policies affirming "traditional marriage."

And once a district adopts such a policy, CFV and its supporters will be right behind to remind school personnel to interpret the policy "properly:" everything which mentions or sanctions homosexuality is a threat to, and incompatible with, traditional marriage.

CFV has rolled out its next anti-gay program, and the target is Dist. 11

CFV's proposal is an unnecessary and divisive policy for our schools and for our community, one we need to oppose. You can make your feelings known by calling the District 11 School Board at 520-2004 or faxing them at 577-4546.

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Teaching the Bible in science classes is: a) a new religious fad, b) anti-intellectual, c) a way to promote student morality, or d) none of the above. Get Citizens Project's new handbook for the latest on the evolution-creationism controversy. It's a good read.

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Community Candidate Forum

Tuesday, March 18 7:00 p.m.
Centennial Hall (200 South Cascade)

In Colorado Springs, the mayor's position and six city council seats are up for grabs. This could be an unprecedented change of leadership – for better or for worse.

You need to know the candidates. Come March 18 to hear their plans and promises.

This Forum is organized by the League of Women Voters and sponsored by Citizens Project and other community organizations.

Don't forget that the Citizens Project candidate survey is available March 19! **Be sure and vote April 1.**

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True Conservatives Capture Local GOP Party; Moderate Republicans Mull Their Options

by Leslie Jorgensen

The "true conservative" Republicans orchestrated a highly effective and successful campaign to "support the pledge" and seize the El Paso County Republican Party. Recent party elections delivered candidates who pledged support for the 1996 national Republican Party platform or asserted pro-life, conservative Christian values.

The social conservative sweep marked the end of the "big tent" era in Colorado Springs when the party leadership preached tolerance for those with differing social views, particularly on the topic of abortion. Touting the "big tent" philosophy, the old GOP guard silenced their differences in the past to work with the Christian, pro-life Republicans who began filtering into the party during *Christian Coalition* Founder Pat Robertson's presidential bid.

The social conservative sweep marks the end of the Republican "big tent" era in Colorado Springs.

But they started to worry when Republican presidential candidates courted Dr. James Dobson, head of Focus on the Family, during the last two elections.

Changes in the party

These fears became reality at the February 10 meeting of the El Paso County GOP Central Committee. At that meeting attorney Wayne Williams was elected chairman of the county party, Focus on the Family executive Tom Minnery won vice-chairman, and Leigh Ann Rauch was chosen secretary.

All three were supported by a coalition of "true conservative" Republicans, the so-called "triple Rs" for "radical, religious, and right."

The conservative coup in this county was strategized by a coalition of social conservatives who held an "invitation only" meeting in January and vowed to elect only "true conservative" candidates who sign a pledge to honor the party platform, primarily the pro-life plank, and protect the sanctity of heterosexual marriages and parental rights.

Power players in this coalition include state Representatives Doug Dean and Doug Lamborn; Focus on the Family employees Tom Minnery, Carrie Gordon and Amy Stephens; Colorado Right to Life county organizer Connie Pratt; and Colorado Christian Coalition Director Chuck Gosnell.

Candidates seeking local party offices sealed their fates by their campaign speeches. Those who declared devotion to the party and omitted religious or pro-life vows lost.

Some are concerned that Focus on the Family, one of the largest employers in Colorado Springs, has gained too much influence in the local Republican Party.

Successful candidates like Focus on the Family executive John Vander Mueler simply said, "I signed the pledge." Others cited their religious devotion, children and grandchildren, and reeled off a litany of complaints against Bob Dole, the government, and the public press.

Whither the moderates

Several pro-life and pro-choice Republicans complained that the "true conservatives" essentially buried the "inclusive" philosophy of the local party and instead launched an "exclusive" club that would force mainstream candidates to petition on to the ballot and eventually cause a backlash.

The impact is already being felt at the state Capitol where some moderate Republican legislators are refusing to be bullied by a leadership that demands they sanction ultraconservative bills, including the proposed ban on partial birth abortion bill sponsored by state Representative Barry Arrington.

Excluded moderates plan to run candidates by petition in the 1998 elections.

These moderates can no longer be whipped into line by threatening loss of support from their county parties. Such support either hasn't been there or won't be there in the future as radical right factions topple the GOP old guard.

In El Paso County, excluded moderate Republicans are laying plans to run "traditional" and "moderate" Republican candidates by petition in the 1998 elections.

Moderate Republicans believe they will have greater success in the election because the "true conservative" Republicans are more extreme than the electorate.

For now, moderates worry that "mainstream" Republicans in El Paso County will be lulled into joining the conservative coup. Voters who don't track inside party maneuvers may blindly follow the cue of those legislators who helped elect the new leadership.

A new focus on Focus

At the February 10 meeting, someone anonymously distributed copies of a Non Sequitur cartoon by cartoonist Scott Adams that depicts an executive telling an employee, "Frankly, we're all getting a little sick of your holier-than-thou attitude..." The cartoon was altered with a "Republicans" sign placed on the executive's desk and the character sporting a papal miter and staff labeled as "Focus on the Family."

Moderate Republicans believe they can still win elections because the "true conservatives" are more extreme than the electorate.

The cartoon reflected concerns that Focus on the Family, one of the largest employers in Colorado Springs, has gained too much influence in the local Republican Party. Like many major companies, employees of this non-profit producer of Christian media and literature have become involved in civic organizations.

However, Focus on the Family has taken a higher profile in the political arena by conducting educational seminars on how to participate in the political system in Colorado and other states.

Minnery said he and other Focus on the Family employees are not precluded from becoming politically active. And, he said, none have used the non-profit company's time, facilities or money for their personal political cause.

Politics and elections in El Paso County will be a different ball game now.

Keeping the faith

One matter that raised a few eyebrows at the Republican meeting on February 10 was a change in the local party bylaws.

Without discussion and with only two dissenting votes, the bylaws were amended to have all candidates or appointed members sign a letter of intent to serve. This letter, to be drafted by the party chairman, will "outline the duties and expectations" for party leaders.

When asked whether "expectations" was a reference to "the pledge" that the true conservative coalition wants all candidates to sign, party chairman Williams said this was not the intent.

Those who won't sign the letter of intent can be ousted by the county GOP Executive Committee and then replaced by others selected by a vacancy committee comprised of Williams, Minnery, and Rauch.

A family breakup

As the new "social conservative" army from the county Republican Party marches into battle on the local and state levels, other local Republicans are meeting to plan strategies.

Derided by social conservatives as "RINOS" (Republicans In Name Only), traditional and moderate Republicans are concerned about their future in a party that has adopted stringent social conservatism and a pro-life stand as the litmus test of true Republicanism.

They concur with Colorado Springs attorney and Republican veteran Jim Mundt, who urged local Republican leaders to keep the "big tent" open and warned that a "true conservative" agenda would cause Republicans to lose elections on the state and national levels, if not locally.

Vice-chairman Minnery promised that he would activate more Republican voters and increase the county party's power at the state and national levels.

Politics and elections in El Paso County will be a different ball game with this new county Republican leadership.

Leslie Jorgensen is a journalist who writes for The Colorado Statesman.

Another Look at School Choice

School choice and school vouchers. That's the topic of a position paper prepared for Citizens Project by educational expert Richard Van Scotter.

"It's a popular solution," says Van Scotter, who notes that school choice conveys a sense of freedom and power. "Being able to choose among options appeals to Americans because it is perceived as being at the heart of the U.S. democratic system and market economy."

Public school choice is usually not controversial, although charter schools have generated some conflict.

But school choice can also undermine our communities and fragment our society.

Public school choice

Van Scotter's paper outlines the many choices of school choice. Nationwide, school choice follows one of two models: public-school choice or private-school choice.

Public-school choice is simply choice among various public schools. It can be implemented district-wide or statewide. After that, there's the question of using magnet schools or charter schools. Colorado is one of 25 states with charter schools.

Programs involving public school choice engender only limited controversy, although attempts by religious conservatives to promote their religious views through charter schools have generated some conflict.

That may increase. A recent Christian Coalition conference included a proposal to use state charter schools as the groundwork for tax-supported religious schools. According to the proposal's author, "the trick is to not go to vouchers directly. Use an intermediate step that will create a large supply of independent schools, called charter schools. Once vouchers are unleashed, these schools can easily be converted to private schools."

Private school choice

Private-school choice–using public funds to send children to private, independent schools–is what most people think of when they hear about school vouchers. Private-school choice can include or exclude parochial (religious) schools.

Private-school choice uses public funds to send children to private, independent schools.

Private-school choice plans which include parochial schools are likely to be unconstitutional. For example, Wisconsin's pioneering private-school voucher plan, which included religious schools, has been held to be unconstitutional (although the decision is under appeal).

Voucher advocates for religious schools are a primary force behind the school choice movement and a major source of controversy.

By contrast, public schools share in self-government and work for the common good.

Does it work?

School choice is a popular political issue, allowing politicians to stand behind those well-liked words "competition" and "choice." However, when implemented, less than two percent of parents opt to have their children attend school outside the home district or local community.

The reason? Because, says Van Scotter, the analogy to marketplace competition is flawed. "Selecting a school is much more complicated and transporting students on a daily basis more involved than seeking out a particular grocery store or hair stylist."

In addition, polls have consistently shown that a majority of parents believe that their local schools are doing a commendable job of educating children.

Parents may also know intuitively what professionals are only now discovering. Although school choice is sold as promoting school improvement through competition, empirical research to date has *not* shown that school choice leads to an improvement in schools.

The need for public schools

A bigger problem, says Van Scotter, is that school choice suffers from a fundamental philosophical defect. "Stated frankly, school choice promotes a consumer-oriented individualism that fosters an impoverished view of liberty."

Parents then believe that education is something for which they can shop. And students learn that schools exist to meet their personal needs, rather than seeing themselves as lead actors in the drama of education. This serves to distort learning, fragment society and undermine community.

Public schools, by contrast, involve "sharing in self-government and working for the common good."

Dumbing Down Our Schools?

Some Creationists Fight Science

Creationists are putting increased pressure on our public schools. They want teachers not to teach evolution in science classes or to also teach creation according to the Bible. If they don't, say these creationists, teachers are being hostile to religion.

Their fear? That teaching students about evolution will undermine their religious faith and promote immorality. Summit Ministries, here in Manitou Springs, teaches that those who believe in evolution will also support pornography, gay rights, socialism and totalitarianism.

"Evolution is at the heart of the Marxist, New Age, Eastern mysticism, and humanist beliefs."
— Dr. David Noebel, Summit Ministries

An either-or model

For strict creationists, the only valid textbook is the Bible. They find the idea that individuals of one species could change sufficiently to become a new, distinct species (evolution) contrary to God's design as laid down in the Bible.

They feel that a belief in evolution denies God and is incompatible with religion. In their view, believing in evolution can lead only to the destruction of society.

These strict creationists are a minority, but a vocal minority.

Most Christians are theistic evolutionists, who are quite comfortable believing that God created the world, following which evolution took place. They reject the black and white either-God-or-evolution viewpoint of the strict creationists.

Creationist rationales

The idea that evolution is blasphemy was effectively laid to rest in Tennessee's famous *Scopes* trial in 1929. Since then, creationists have devised other rationales to bring religious creationism into public schools. Here are a few of them.

Strict creationists believe evolution denies God and is incomptable with religion.

• *A balanced approach.* Creationists want science teachers to include Christian beliefs to "balance" evolution. This "balanced approach" was the justification in 1996 when a Jefferson County student objected to his science classes. It also showed up in Colorado Springs when the new District 20 charter school said that the school would teach evolution and creationism "side by side" so children could decide which to believe.

Most Christians are theistic evolutionists who are quite comfortable with evolution.

• *The intelligent design theory.* Creationists argue that the earth shows an intelligent design, and this is scientific proof that God created the world. This view has been popularized by Focus on the Family and *Of Pandas and People*, a creationist textbook that uses an intelligent design approach.

• *The "evidence against evolution."* Georgia and Ohio considered legislation last year to require public schools to teach "evidence against evolution." This legislation failed to pass in both states. When pressed for "evidence against evolution," proponents respond with many of the same arguments they use to support creationism. Nonetheless, creationists believe this is a promising opening to discredit evolution in schools.

To learn more

If you believe in evolution, does that mean you are anti-religion? Should our public school science classes teach biblical beliefs in order not to offend the religious beliefs of local Christian creationists? What does the law say?

Citizens Project has just published a handbook entitled *The Evolution Battle in Public Schools* that discusses these and other issues.

This handbook is informative, easy to read, and up to date.

Your copy is available from Citizens Project: free to members and $10 to non-members. Simply call the CP office at 520-9899.

Citizens Project

Inside CP

Candidate Forum

Don't forget the candidate forum for Colorado Springs City Council/Mayor candidates 7:00 p.m. Tuesday March 18 at Centennial Hall (200 South Cascade). This is organized by the League of Women Voters.

Co-sponsors include Citizens Project, Citizens Goals, The Urban League, The Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, NAACP, Ground Zero, *The Independent*, Retired School Employees Association, Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition, Springs Area Beautiful Association, American Association of University Women, American Association of Retired Persons, and Federally Employed Women.

CP in the news

CP Executive Director Megan Day was a guest on KGFT's *The Grant Connection*, a Christian talk show. The show focused on articles in the February *Freedom Watch*, specifically the sexual conduct policy that CFV has proposed for School District 11. While callers were not always friendly, Megan helped listeners better understand Citizens Project's mission to help shape a better community.

Megan and Mike Miles of the Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition were guests on radio station KVOR to discuss the two District 11 controversies–the student publications policy and CFV's sexual conduct proposal.

Schools Network

Please consider joining the CP Schools Network and helping to support and improve our public schools. All it takes is a phone call to the CP office (520-9899). We provide tools to help effect change in your local schools.

Wish list

We need someone with librarian experience (or someone who just loves to file) to help manage our research library and possibly help research issues. A daytime volunteer on a regular weekly schedule would be preferable.

We would love to have a small tape recorder to help us record speeches and events of interest.

Change of editorship

Long-time *Freedom Watch* editor Douglas Triggs will soon hang up his editor's hat. "It's been a lot of work," said Triggs, "but I think *Freedom Watch* has made a real impact–and will continue to make an impact – on important issues in the Pikes Peak area."

Freedom Watch will continue on, even as Citizens Project begins interviewing for a new editor.

Announcements

Things in common

The Pikes Peak Justice and Peace Commission will host Pulitzer Prize nominee and reporter Donna Minkowitz. Her lecture is "Intimate Enemy: Finding Myself in the Religious Right." Minkowitz, an advocate for gay and lesbian equality, will talk about what she has found in common with her adversaries, and how this understanding helps her work for genuine social change.

She will speak at 7:30 p.m. Saturday March 8 at Sacred Heart Church, 2026 West Colorado Avenue, Colorado Springs. It's free to all.

Hear the candidates

Can't attend the March 18 candidate forum? You can still compare the candidates. Radio station KVOR (1300 AM) will interview candidates for mayor and for the Colorado Springs City Council at 11 a.m. each Sunday. Here's the schedule: March 2: Dawson Hubert and Mike Neeley; March 9: Linda Barley and William Herpin; March 16: Cheryl Gillaspie and Bill Guman; March 23: Mary Lou Makepeace and Daniel Bloom; March 30: John Hazelhurst and David Stiver. Other candidates (Jim Null, Tom Gallagher, Zelna Joseph, and Peggy James) have already appeared on the show.

EarthDance gatherings

Earth-based spirituality will be the theme of a new series of monthly meetings to strengthen community. Crescent Council meetings will focus on listening and partnership; the first is 7 p.m. on April 9. Abundance Celebrations will focus on music, movement and expression; the first is 7 p.m. on April 22. All meetings are at All Souls Church, Tejon and Dale Streets, Colorado Springs. For more information, call Karla at 635-0532.

You can make a difference

JOIN Citizens Project

Your voice for tolerance in the Pikes Peak region.

Citizens Project ...

- Reports on news and views in *Freedom Watch*
- Organizes campaigns, workshops and events
- Sponsors Candidate Surveys and Forums
- Monitors and informs on legislative and other issues

... and more

❑ Yes, I'd like to join Citizens Project! Enclosed is my membership contribution of $20.

❑ I'm already a member, but I'm ready to do more! Enclosed is my contribution of:

❑ $20 ❑ $35 ❑ $50 ❑ $120 ❑ Other: $_____

(All members receive a postage paid subscription to Freedom Watch.)

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Double Your Money

The Gill Foundation has pledged to match each gift of $250 or more to Citizens Project for a limited time. That means your $500 gift will bring a total of $1,000 to Citizens Project.

Colorado Springs faces new challenges to tolerance and separation of church and state every day. Now more than ever, Citizens Project is the voice of principle and reason that our community needs.

Help strengthen Citizens Project through the Gill Foundation's unprecedented offer. Your gift of $250 or more will increase our effectiveness and ensure our long-term financial stability. Your support keeps us going.

Please take a moment to send your tax-deductible gift to Citizens Project. Call Megan at (520-9899) if you have questions.

Thanks from all of us at Citizens Project.

Join the Staff; Share the Fun

Citizens Project is looking for an editor (or co-editors) committed to producing a high quality newsletter. *Freedom Watch* provides information available nowhere else in Colorado Springs. It's useful and important!

Time commitment would be 20-30 hours per month. Pay is negotiable but not extravagant. Experience and interest are strong pluses. Benefits include meeting nice people, knowing the inside scoop on organizations and events in our fine city, and helping to create a better community. Call Megan for more information.

Human Relations Corner

Members of the Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition participated in the Community Summit held January 25.

HRC Vice-chair Mike Miles authored an article in the February 16 Gazette Telegraph. The article opposed the curriculum changes in School District 11 that have been proposed by Colorado for Family Values.

The HRC Board is planning a series of Community Forums to engage various community groups in dialog around human rights issues. These Forums will entertain, educate, and provide participants with information to assist them in advocating for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Our Mission: Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion and separation of church and state.

Citizens Project

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